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## Current Issues in Comparative Pragmatics : Insights into Linguistic and Cultural Encounters

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## PREFACE

# CURRENT ISSUES IN COMPARATIVE PRAGMATICS: INSIGHTS INTO LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS

JUHANI HÄRMÄ, HARTMUT E. H. LENK,  
BEGOÑA SANROMÁN VILAS  
& ELINA SUOMELA-HÄRMÄ

As a fairly recent<sup>1</sup> branch of study, pragmatics has rapidly established its position as one of the most fertile and dynamic fields of linguistics, along with another burgeoning field, discourse analysis (also sometimes referred to as text linguistics). Both domains examine communication and interaction, one of the differences being the expanding interest of pragmatics for communication between speakers with different linguistic backgrounds and representing different cultures. This does not necessarily involve the use of two or more languages, since communication can take place through one lingua franca, which emphasizes the social aspects of human interaction by pointing out the preference for a certain language as the basis of a vehicular language. The two mentioned disciplines, pragmatics and discourse analysis, complete each other and their interplay can lead to excellent results, as seen in the contributions of the present volume.

Not only linguistic but also social aspects are present in the situations described in the contributions of the present volume, which is centred on the comparison of different types of language usage in two or more

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<sup>1</sup> The first linguistic handbooks or introductions containing the word “pragmatics” seem to have been published in the 1970s, which is also the case for discourse studies.

languages. The term “comparative pragmatics” is to be understood broadly, “comparative” referring to linguistic as well as to cultural contexts or situations and, thus, being more extensive than e.g. the term “contrastive” would suggest. In current pragmatic discourse, multi-perspective/multimodal methods can be seen as one of the best ways to understand language use in context. This is also reflected in this volume, which adopts an interdisciplinary approach to pragmatics and focuses on the comparison of a wide selection of languages, including English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Japanese, Persian, Polish and Swedish. Indeed, the fact that these articles have been written in more than one language properly reveals the spirit of present-day communication, that is, that language knowledge cannot be confined to just one major language that should be adopted everywhere.

This volume is one of the very rare publications in this area, in which every topic is analysed by comparing its use in at least two different languages, or by contrasting the use made by native and/or non-native speakers—for instance, learners of foreign languages or speakers of a *lingua franca*. The two or three languages may be genetically related, but may also belong to totally different language families. This ensures entirely new points of view and approaches. Pragmatics will be the main connecting factor, but not the only one. Other central keywords or concepts linking the articles are culture, discourse, interaction, language use in the media and sociolinguistics. Both oral and written materials are objects of study, which properly reflects again the multifaceted approaches which tie the contributions together.

The articles deal with, among others, grammatical expressions, prosody, text types, conversation strategies, politeness and speech acts, which occur in different social interactions as well as in multicultural environments, including e. g. foreign language acquisition. Foreign language teaching and acquisition are of course, as could be expected, one of the major recurrent themes in this volume.

Elizabeth Couper-Kuhlen’s contribution, “Comparing language use in social interaction”, brings to the fore the scope and validity of the results obtained by comparing language use within an interactional linguistic framework, as well as methodological questions. The chapter presents two studies comparing English and Finnish. The former analyses a form-oriented investigation of division-of-labour structures. The latter is an action-oriented research comparing the practices for implementing a directive action and its repetition. The outcomes show that, even if in both languages similar formats are used for the same action of division-of-labour and an analogous directive action is materialized with similar

expressions, the two languages do not completely overlap. As a consequence, language-specific collateral effects are generated that raise further questions which deserve attention.

Patricia von Münchow investigates how German and French school-history textbooks deal with National Socialism and World War II. In the first part of her paper, she presents the basic concepts of her cross-cultural discourse analysis—a model that is located at the crossroads of French discourse analysis, text linguistics and cross-cultural studies. A special focus lies on the detection and interpretation of the unsaid. In her analysis, she shows that textbook authors are more or less caught up in a network of discursive rules on what to say, what not to say and how to say or not to say it. But this network is developing, and the rules and “memory regimes” in both countries and discourse communities are changing. Some facts and presentations, which used to be dominant in the official historical discourse, have become less prominent, but might still appear in the textbooks. Statements that were almost banned from the mainstream public discourse are now accepted, but still need to be presented with caution. Others are still very sensitive but may be expressed by other means, like photos or maps.

Jean Bazantay and Chantal Claudel compare manifestations of empathy in formulaic expressions of consolation and encouragement in Japanese and French. In discussing the concepts of routine and ritual, the authors conclude that French expressions could be considered as routines, whereas in Japanese politeness is expressed by ritual *aisatsus*. The authors then examine the expression of empathy in emails. Even if formulaic expressions appear in both languages, where they tend to lose their initial semantic value, Japanese emails show a greater concern for the addressee and a stronger valorisation of empathy than the corresponding French messages.

Mari Wiklund's and Martti Vainio's paper presents and analyses different subjectively salient, prosodically characteristic speech types occurring in mildly autistic preadolescents' speech. Autistic people often have deviant prosodic features in their speech, and the paper focuses on the following types: 1) flat (monotonous) pitch; 2) large pitch excursions; and 3) bouncing pitch. In addition to the phonetic descriptions of the phenomena, the paper discusses the other participants' possible reactions to these prosodic features, and occurrences of the features are studied in a larger context from an interactional point of view. The data come from authentic group therapy sessions during which 11- to 13-year-old Finnish-speaking boys ( $n = 7$ ) and French-speaking boys ( $n = 4$ ) talked to each other and their two therapists.

So-called “Gesprächswörter” as German words with the function of discourse markers and/or particles are the subject of Jörg Kilian’s paper written in German. His contribution includes the perspective of historical lexicography and grammar as well as aspects of didactics of language acquisition, especially of foreign or second language learning. Kilian shows that these words were part of dictionaries and grammars already from the 17th century, which offers possibilities for ambitious and thus motivating tasks in language courses for both native speakers and second-language learners of German. The analysis of historical texts in the classroom puts school students with different backgrounds on a similar level. However, existing German textbooks unfortunately fail to present useful exercises in this regard, as the analysis of some examples shows.

Marge Käsper examines the means that French has at its disposal to express the effects of discursive complicity, which is created in Estonian by the particle *ju*. The analysis of this particle brings together evidentiality and epistemic modality, orality and argumentative rhetorics, as well as German and Swedish equivalents. The study of academic texts (human and social sciences) belonging to the parallel French-Estonian corpus CoPEF reveals that in order to render the nuances pertaining to *ju*, French resorts to various connectors (*car*, *en effet*). As to translations from French to Estonian, *ju* is used when the French text contains modalisations and rhetorical questions.

When looking for minor pragmatic differences, in several cases the utterance in French tends to give instructions for interpretation to the reader, while in the Estonian text the interpretation sources (indirect reported speech, for instance) and results (agreement with the utterance) tend to be presumed.

Magdalena Adamczyk’s paper, “Polish non-nominal *coś* in a cross-linguistic perspective: Insights from translation material”, examines the different meanings of the Polish expression *coś* when employed as a particle. The research uses qualitative methods based on translation material. Accordingly, the author compiles a collection of the uses of the particle and asks a group of qualified professionals for their translation into English. Adamczyk analyses the results identifying all the English equivalents and classifying them according to their different meanings and the function they express. The outcomes of the study show that *coś* is a context-dependent expression, by means of which the speaker can communicate notions of uncertainty, imprecise knowledge or even small quantities of abstract entities, among others.

Maryam Mohammadi exploits the pragmatic potential of speech act conditionals (SACs) used as responses to polar questions. The author

shows that an answer such as *If you want to take the train, the next one leaves in 20 minutes* to the question *Has the train to Berlin left yet?* provides more detailed information than a simple *yes*. Based on the fact that English and Persian behave similarly in this respect, Mohammadi designs an experiment separately involving American and Persian informants with a set of pre-elaborated dialogues to validate the acceptability of SACs as adequate responses in a conversation. Results indicate that informants in both languages accept SACs as indirect answers without significant differences, although Persian informants display more varied opinions than Americans.

Outi Toropainen and Sinikka Lahtinen examine language learners' pragmatic competence by focusing on explicit apologies in a text-based communicative writing task written in Finnish and in Finland Swedish. The produced texts were assessed according to the Common European Frame of Reference (CEFR) scale and compared with native speakers' productions. Although language proficiency has a certain effect on the forms of apologies and the results show a lack of contextualised teaching, variants of *sorry* appear on all levels, including native speakers. This can be explained by the generalisation of colloquial youth language influenced by English.

Vicent Beltrán-Palancues's contribution to the volume, "Multimodal pragmatics in FL interactions: The case of complaints and responses to complaints", uses a multimodal conversation analysis approach to study the interlanguage pragmatics of Spanish learners of English. In particular, the study examines audio-visual recordings of one complaint-response to complaint sequence elicited by two Spanish learners of English. The object of the study is to explore how learners construct talk in a role-play task, which involves a complaint situation, using different linguistic and extra-linguistics resources such as head movement, gaze, gestures, etc. Among the outcomes, the study shows the pragmalinguistic resources that learners are able to display at a particular proficiency level. Moreover, the task helps learners to be more aware of the interaction between different semiotic resources to convey meaning in face-to-face interaction.

Katharina Beuter's article deals with repair in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in different types of interaction between Tanzanian and German school students. Even if ELF interactions are considered quite unproblematic in spite of high linguacultural diversity, Beuter's study demonstrates a variety of repair mechanisms at work in adolescent ELF interactions used for negotiating meaning and including some relational implications. These exchanges constitute a formally diverse and function-



ally versatile cooperative achievement and they are open to other-involvement in repair, often avoided by adults for reasons of politeness.

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<sup>2</sup> CoCoLaC stands for *Contrasting and Comparing Languages and Cultures*, see <https://www.helsinki.fi/en/researchgroups/comparing-and-contrasting-languages-and-cultures>.